Design Course

Handmade Type - Part 1

The Art of using Everyday Objects

by
Ruchi Shah
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-1

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2. History
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Introduction

In this module we will see what happens when objects from our everyday world - turn into ubiquitous creative tools. Today the borders between design, image making, illustration, art and typography are becoming increasingly blurred. A prominent development of contemporary design is how creative visions are manifesting themselves into material objects and spaces. This module will show the unprecedented use of materials and innovative ideas – graphics morph into tangible typography - what was intangible is made visual through handmade craftsmanship with a physical experience.

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History

Let us look at letters, not just as abstract forms and carriers of meaning; but instead as real, physical shapes. If we treat these shapes creatively there is a possibility that we cease to only read them; we go on to understand the meaning depending on how they are arranged and the materials used for making them. As each of these qualities, add another dimension to the letter - the letter turns into an image. This can be called 'expressive typography'.

The 1960's saw a surge of 'expressive typography', where the type is physically modified to literally create/ illustrate a statement. Designers like Herb Lubalin NY

Massin from France and Otto Storch are well known for their practices in it. A simple word or line comes alive when treated expressively. A desire for doing 'something differently' amongst the designers according to Allen Hulburt is what initiated a new chain of works.

In 1964 Massimo Vignelli's XXXII Biennale Posterbroke new ground. Rather than setting or embossing the typography he went on to cut each character out of paper. Shadows were created with the irregular bending of the paper, and furthermore the poster was photographed, just the way a product would be, allowing the word to become an image.

Iconographic typography on the other hand is when letters are converted to illustrations. They have a strong graphical personality. Alphabets from 'Champ Fleury' by Geoffroy Tory is one of the earliest examples of iconographic text, where alphabets are created with shapes of tools, it is an example of how a typeface can be extended pictorially rather than being merely symbolic. Today a number of free font websites have decorative fonts like the ones shown below, which are created on the same principles.

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Cats Alphabet', 'Rope', 'Nailed' and 'LicensePlates' are some examples of free decorative fonts that can be found online at Dafont.com

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Some of Google logos are good examples of how the font/ logo has become an image, and relating to it is so easy that even if all the letters are replaced with objects and images one can still read the word Google.

The Google logo depicting 'Ida' the missing-link fossil of Darwinius masillae that was discovered recently. Google - illustrated as London city. Google celebrating St. Patricks Day, Google logo commemorating the New Year, Google acknowledgment of Lego and finally Google tribute to legendary artist Joan Miro.

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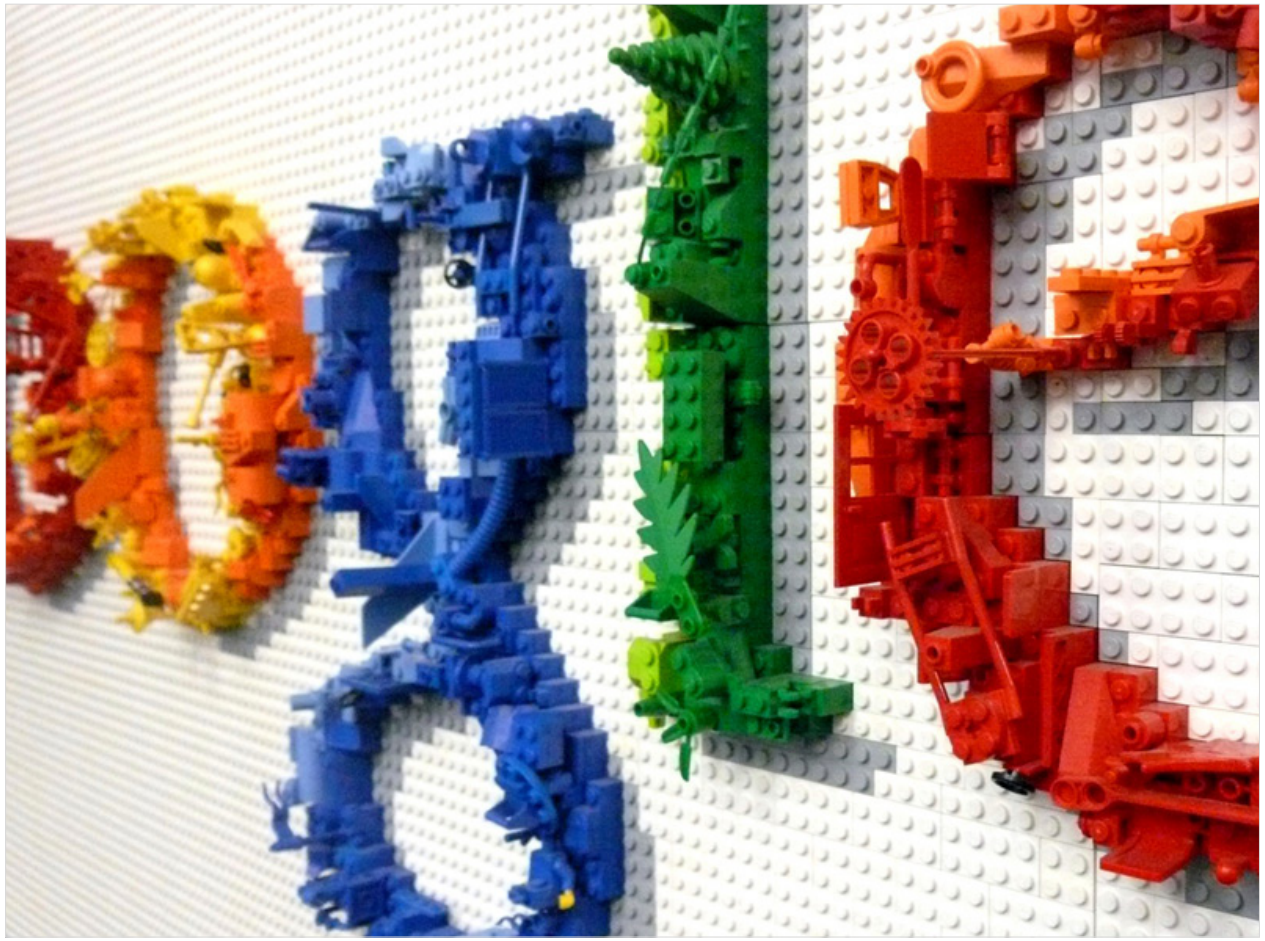

Google New York office has a gigantic logo made from Lego bricks, making the entire logo tangible and imparting the feeling of a literally 'constructed' type.

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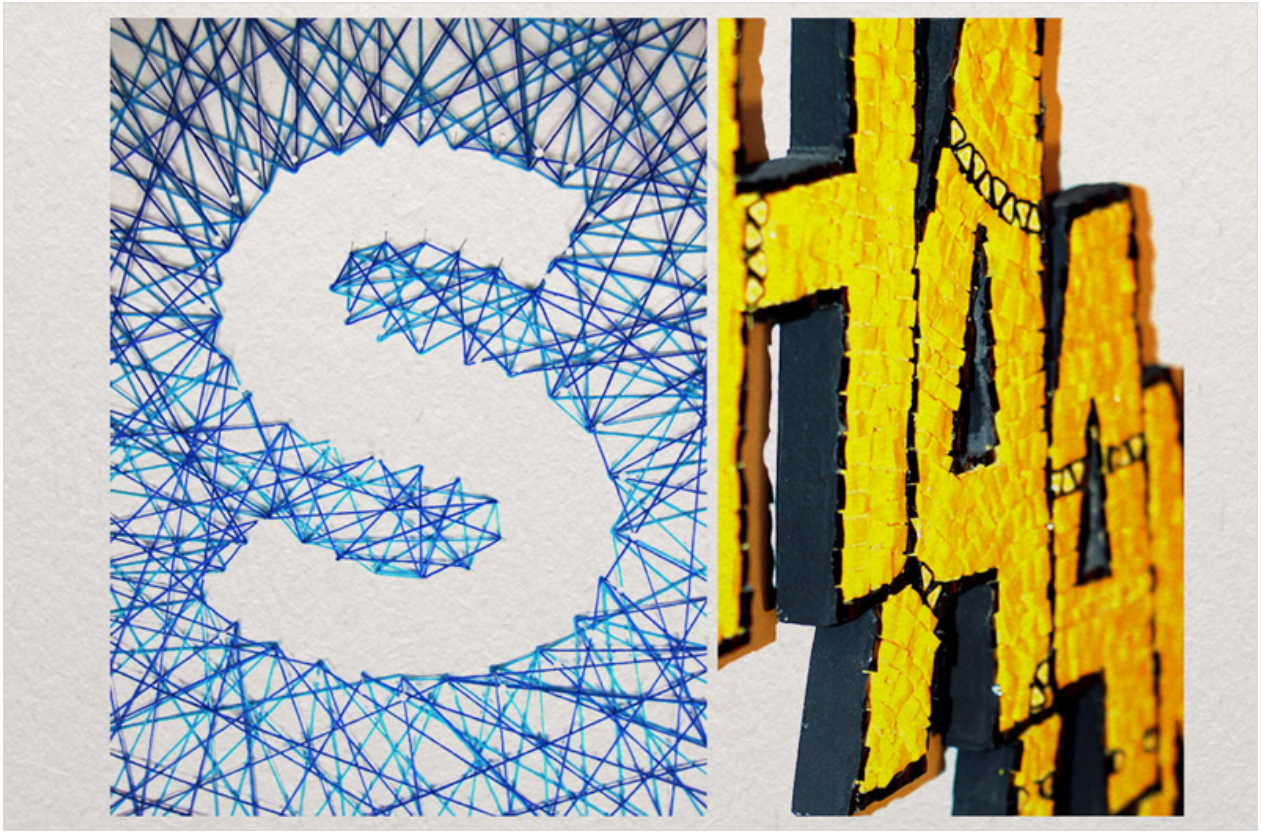
The images below are just suggestions to open up the different possibilities of our visual vocabulary. Communicating through words or images does not have to be staid, or purely functional it has to be practiced mindfully, creatively and respectfully. It is important to keep developing unique, untraditional work, taking inspiration from everything that surrounds us.



In the first image you can see the letter "S" which was created using pins and embroidery thread by artist Lauren Manning. The space outside of the character has been filled by winding and weaving two colours of thread around the pins. It is interesting to see how the negative space forms the letter form, with the positive space filled.

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The second image is, the word 'Wham!' crafted in the byzantine mosaic technique by Barbara Liverani who likes combining ancient techniques with modernity.

This is an factually edible font, it has been created by Funkadelic Type.

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Understanding the Medium

You will slowly see how ideas become real through beautifully crafted design. But this has to be coupled with a great understanding of the medium; in this case the medium is all the objects on my desk, around my room and on my table that I have collected. Try to understand how different objects behave; Why don't bangles bend? How much can rubber bands stretch? What sort of folds, does the belt create? How well, can books be arranged?

By playing with, and observing the medium carefully one can understand what it allows us to do and what it doesn't. Instead of using a pencil or a pen today we will be writing with ropes, wires, safety pins, scarves, paper, keys, balloons, clips, clothes pins, rubber bands, U-pins, belts, measuring tapes, screws, pebbles and anything else that we can find.

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Creating the Form

To begin with I have picked my favorite scarf to create some alphabets roughly. The fabric is easy to bend, stays in place, take up whatever form I want it to. Watch what happens to each letter, their thickness and proportions.

This is the first attempt to arrange the fabric to create letters, in order to realize its possibilities.

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In the art of the creating the letterform, designers have to closely analyze and craft every detail of each character carefully – emphasis is placed even on the negative space, often known as counter space. The counter space is often ignored and overlooked because it is not the portion that we normally read. However, just like the positive space, the counter offers the opportunity to create a visually rich typeface.

Understanding the form of the letter - visually; as a mass, an outline and a balance between negative and positive space was essential while creating it finally with the material at hand.

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Understanding the nature of the material.

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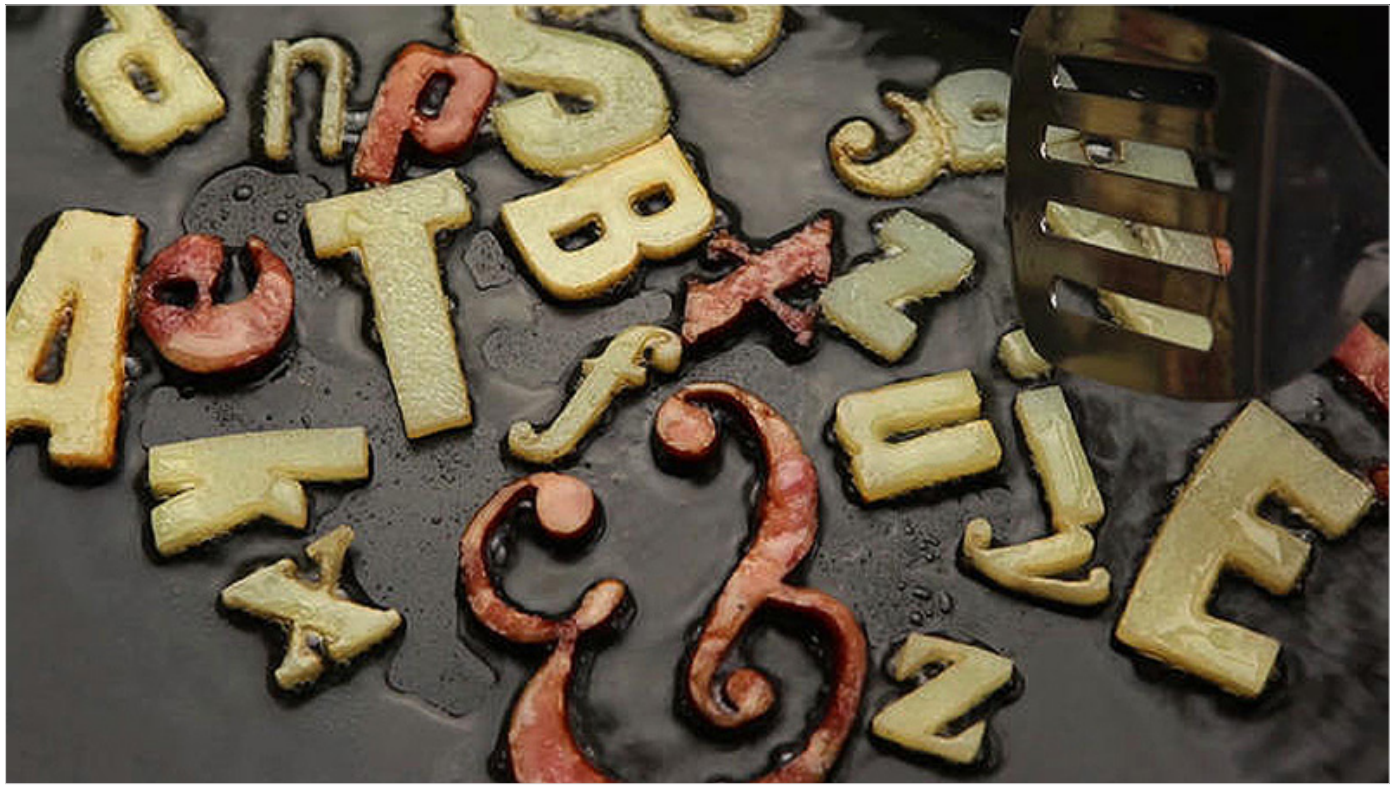
A cursive font would have demanded longer fabric, owing to its linearity or it could be created with some wire or rope. A thick heavy font could be created by stacking books or arranging pebbles, an eatable font would have to be fashioned from food. Different styles and proportions of letterforms along with the message demand a different medium accompanied with a flair for understanding it.



This image is a great example of an eatable font, made with vegetables cutout in the shape of typefaces which are being fried on a pan. It was created for the Typophile Film Festival 5 Opening Titles - by Brent Barson.

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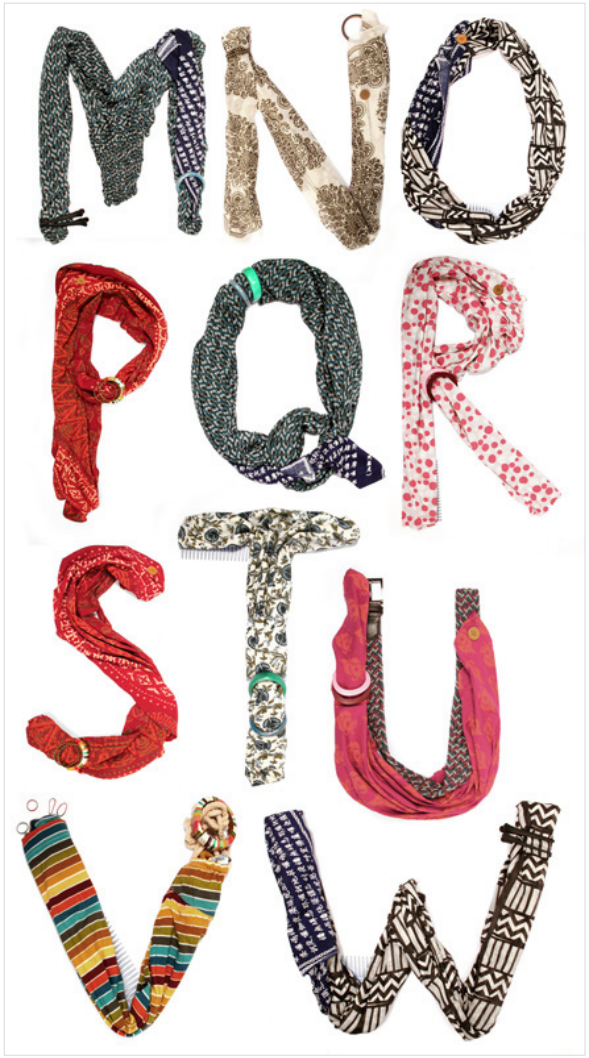
The Final Type:
Finally 3 pajama's, 1 belt, 3 scarves, 3 tunics, 1 skirt, 1 button, 6 bangles, 1 comb, 2 clips, some rubber bands and a lot of creativity is what went into creating this font - that has been made primarily from fabric. Each letter has its own identity, but finally forms a family that they belong to. Proportions have to be considered carefully, the negative space and positive space has to be balanced well to create a visually rich font. Owing to the more spread out, flowing nature of fabric I have created a bold but irregular font that is apt for utilizing the qualities of the various textiles.



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A - Z created with clothes and textiles.

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Exploring the Medium

The easiest way to understand different mediums is to create the same letter over and over again with different mediums, or simply create any one shape. Pulling, twisting, pushing, pressing, tearing, folding, cutting, arranging, sticking, stitching, stacking, pinning, breaking, molding and fixing, all these activities should be tried with respect to each medium/object. You will be left with a better understanding of how to handle each medium, and with a sense of making appropriate choices while creating artworks.

The images shown below demonstrate the different qualities of 7 objects. The letter 'A' has been created in different materials, thicknesses and styles. After creating the different A's, I went through all the fonts on my computer, and found fonts that match the nature and visual appearance of all the A's I have created, you can see them typed out in grey with the original image.

A thick font has been fashioned from a belt.

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A clothes pin is the most obvious, capital 'A'.

A skinny, wobbly 'A' was created using a green shoelace.

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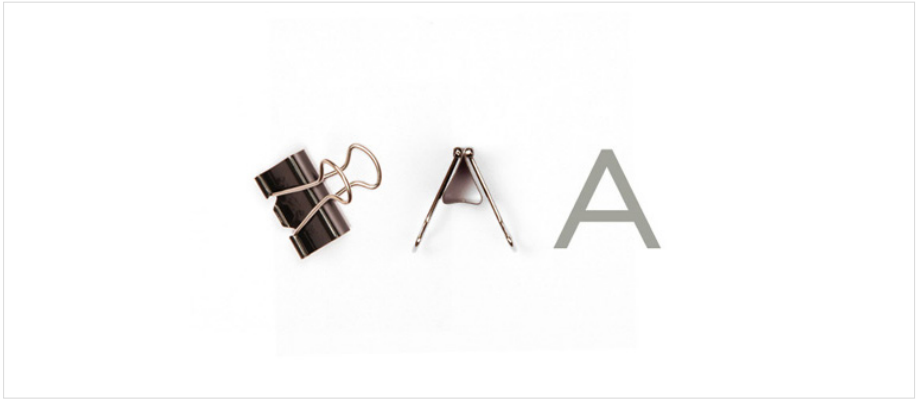

If you look carefully, from a different angle, even a paper clip looks like the letter 'A'.

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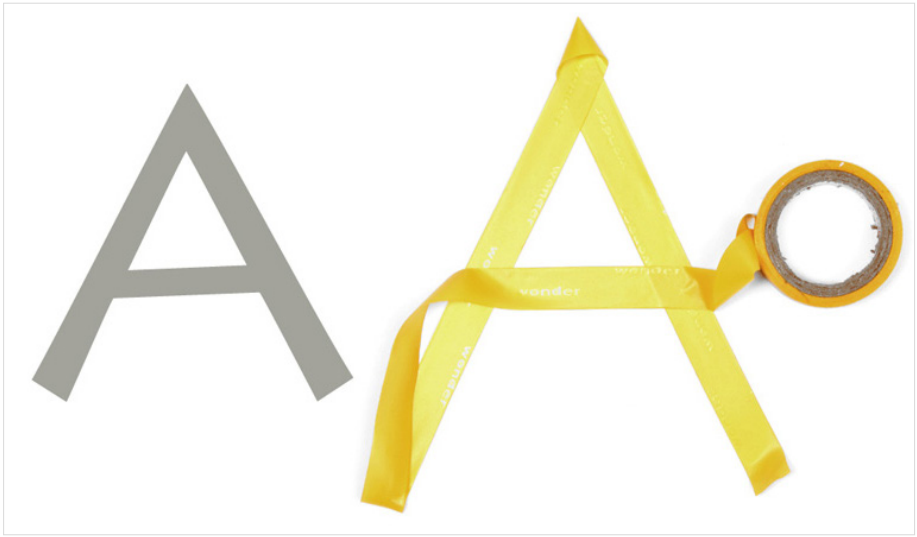

An electricians tape has been twisted, turned and stuck, to create a letterform.

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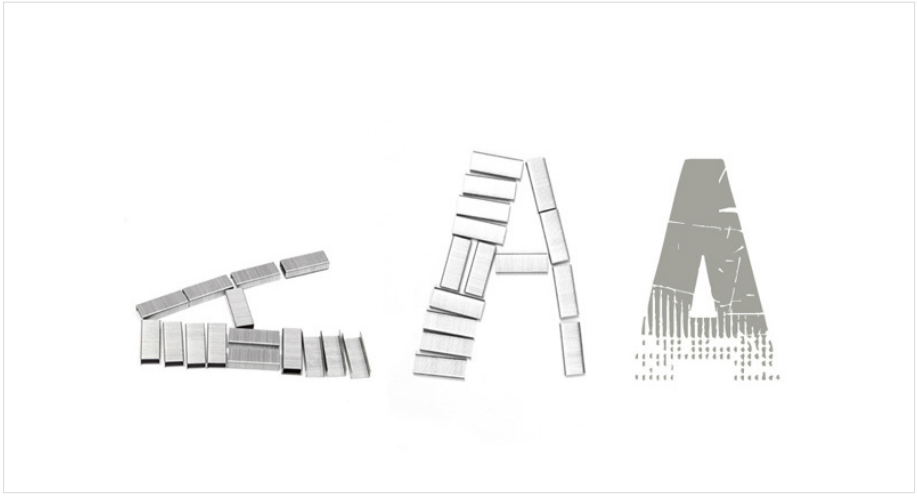
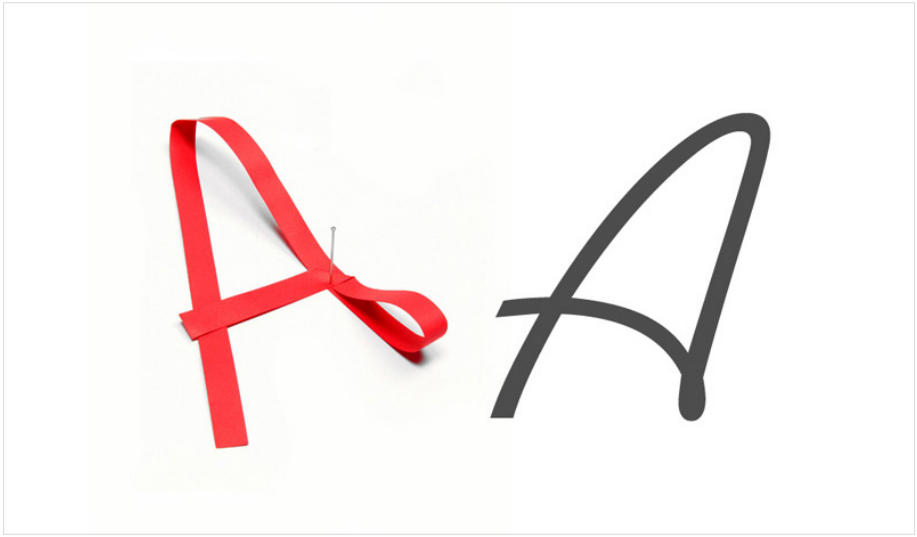


Staple pins for a more distorted 'A'.



A strip of paper can be folded to created a handwritten type of 'A'.

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Sometimes the form of the everyday objects matches so closely to the letterform like the clothes pin for instance, that no effort on part of the viewer will have to be made in order to associate the letter with the object. Herb Lubalin's Rock and Roll poster, 1957 gives an indication of a humorous insight of this type. He has successfully merged objects with statements to bring about humor and thoughtfulness at the same time. The text of the poster is 'Ever since Rock was a stone and Roll was a bun...' Both the O's are respectfully replaced by a real rock and a real bun literally bringing the message alive on the poster.

On similar lines one can see how the letter 'O' has been replaced in the words 'Love, Noel, Joy' by Christmas baubles, in a greeting card designed by artist Lauren Manning.

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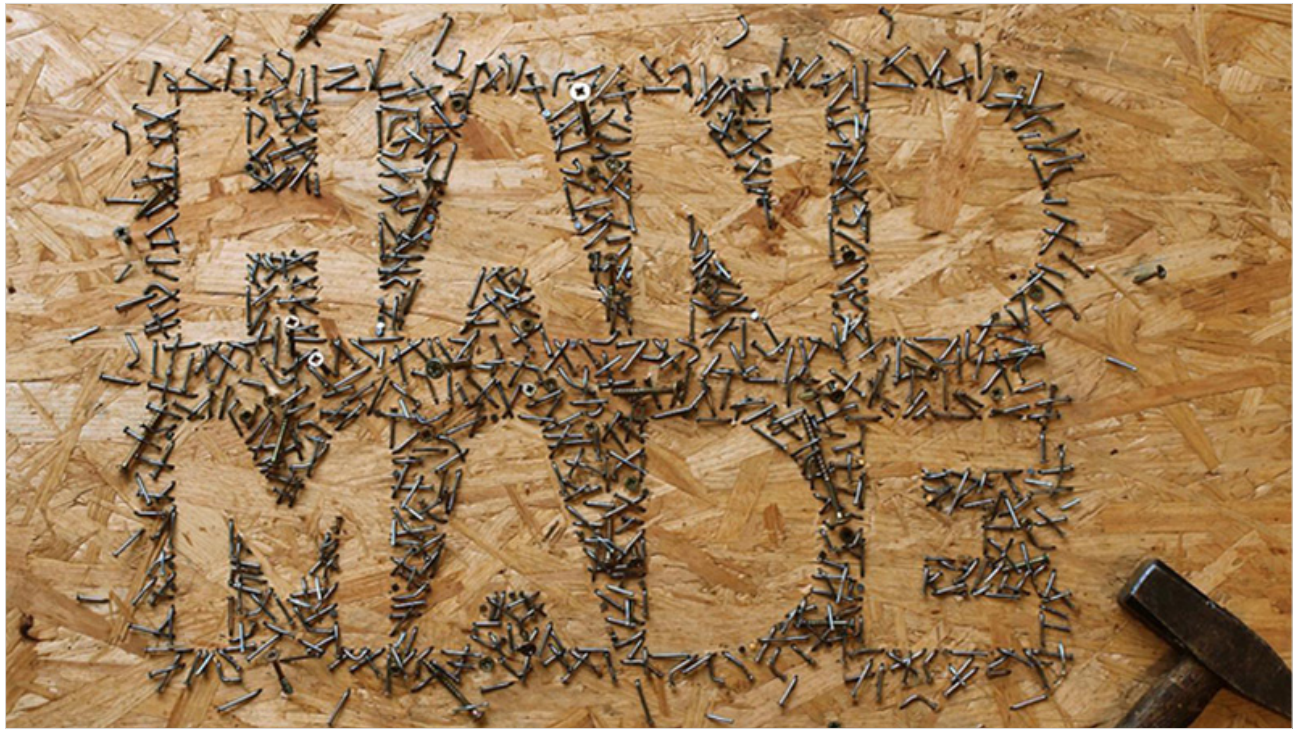
Expressing the Word

What does the word mean?
What is the word or the phrase that has to be expressed. What does it mean. Do you want it to mean something else. Can you create a visual pun that will make it more memorable? The word has to become a visual cue.

Edward Ruscha's 'Made in California' poster is a great paradigm where California's quintessential qualities - Sea, Sunshine and Oranges, have been personified by - a type that appears to be water - on the orange colored poster.



Julian Rojas has preserved the essence of the word 'handmade', by creating it with numerous nails hammered into wood - it effectively creates a memory trigger for DIY work.

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As a simple exercise let us take for instance the word 'Love', it means different things to different people. It is a common word, and we all feel it in different ways in our daily life. Love can be beautiful. Love can be in excess, it can be possessive and claustrophobic. It can be temporary. It can be a geeky love for machinery. Or a love for drinking! A food lover's love is different from a book lover's love.

The images above express 'Love' in different materials and varied objects.

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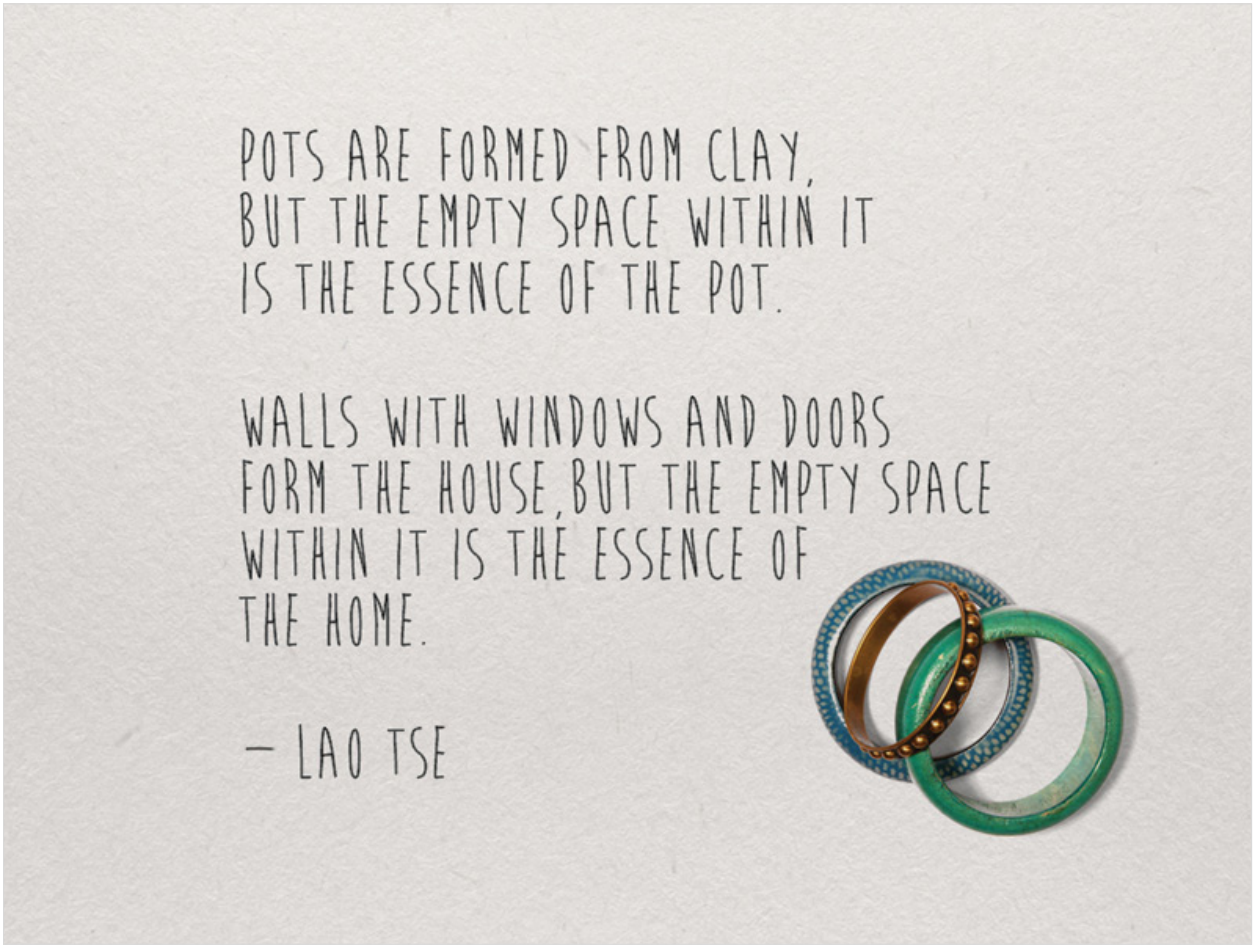
Observe what happens to the word and the play on its meaning, owing to the unique nature of each medium. The same word imparts diverse feelings when it is recreated with different materials.

The objects in question can be repeated endlessly to reinforce the word/meaning, lending itself to a pattern-based type. Or they could be used to create a visual contradiction - imagine the word 'Fire' written with ice-cubes and water, and what if the word 'Water' was made in paper, and "Paper' written with fabric. What if 'Love' was created with false, plastic roses? Different images are being created here, which in turn are imparting different ideas. Qualities and meanings can be constantly substituted or contradicted.

Using the Space:


POTS ARE FORMED FROM CLAY,
BUT THE EMPTY SPACE WITHIN IT
IS THE ESSENCE OF THE POT.
WALLS WITH WINDOWS AND DOORS
FORM THE HOUSE, BUT THE EMPTY SPACE
WITHIN IT IS THE ESSENCE OF
THE HOME.
– LAO TSE

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The negative and positive space when balanced carefully can create a beautiful type, as we have seen earlier. But, sometimes the space where the type has been created, also contributes greatly to its form and meaning.

Depending on the size and nature of the material, and the word or phrase that has to be created, one can get a sense of the proportions and space required. If the word is made from small paper pins, a table top snap is sufficient to capture it. But if the artworks have to be created in a bigger space, maybe outdoors the requirements and angles that it would be shot from are quite different.

When outdoors, '*where*' you stage and create the typography can also be vitally important as the surroundings can also be of significance. Three factors which are: The '*word*', means something, the *medium* it is created from - can carry a meaning & finally where it is created, the *type of space* used, can also be aptly chosen. The union of all three can produce interesting results. One such example can be seen in the works of contemporary graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister's bold artworks which are an excellent reference to this point.

'Always' - means forever and continuously. Ironically it has been written on a contradictory surface - beautiful flowers, that wither and die. The meaning of the word becomes a contradiction in itself.

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Pieces of cloth have been wound across different trees, at different distances to create this word. This particular bit of typography is visible and readable only when captured from a certain angle, which makes it very interesting.

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-1/expressing-word

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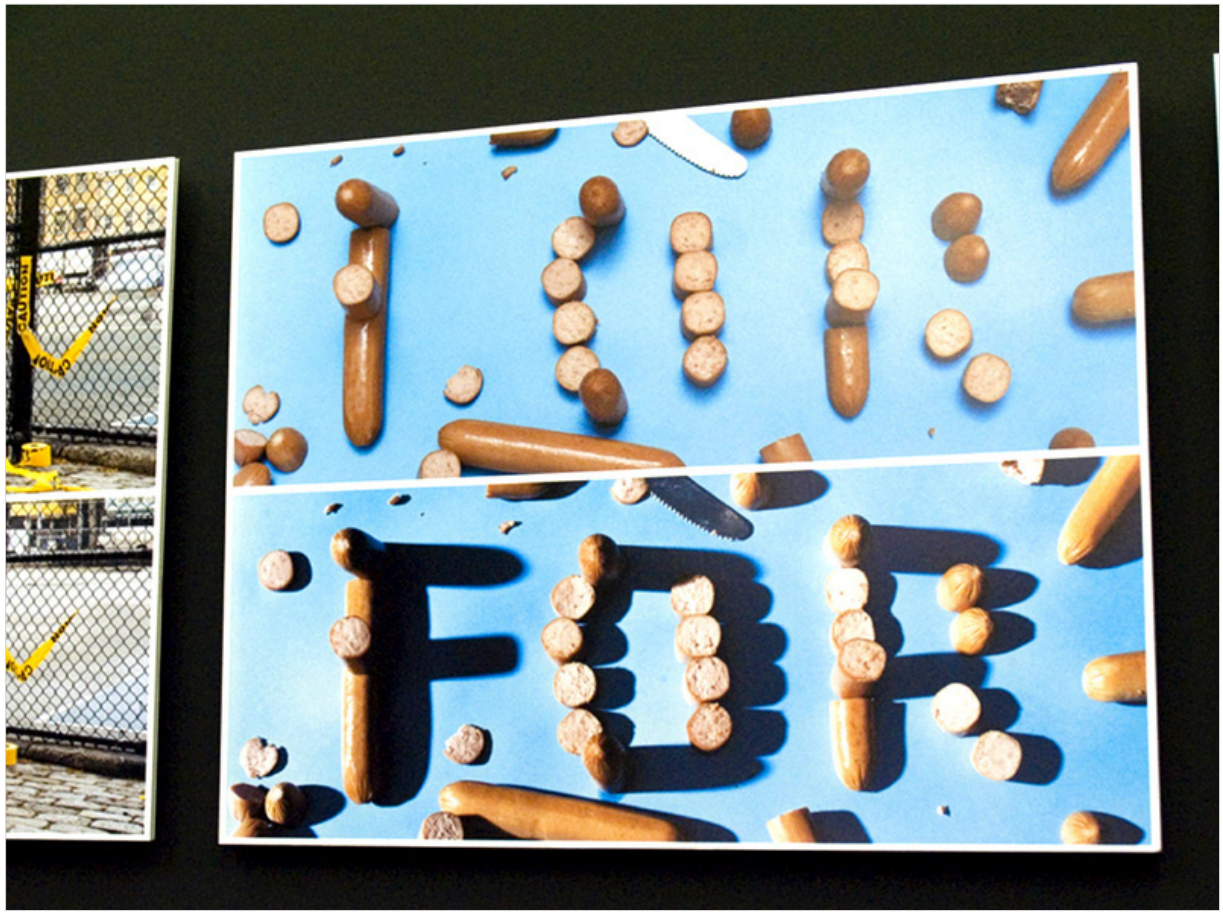

These pieces of bread that look incomplete in the frame above, actually get a meaning when a source of light is placed on the side, forcing them to cast a shadow that goes on to complete the incomplete letters. Who had ever thought, that sliced baguettes and shadows together could create a word.

Design Course

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A football field behind, and typography created with a cacti on the fence around it seem to signify the passion and love amidst a difficult life!

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Learn to Make, Make to Learn

While creating the artwork there are something's that we need to keep in mind:

ALL THE TEXTILES AND FABRICS THAT I WILL BE USING FOR THE PROJECT
PINS & RUBBER BANDS TO FIX THINGS INTO PLACE
AN EMPTY CLEAN BACKGROUD TO COMPOSE AND SHOOT ON
ROLEX

The materials and objects that have to be shot should be ready at hand with pins, glue and rubber bands etc. too hold them in place.

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For shooting in a photo studio, the lights have to be set up. A DSLR camera should be used preferably for better quality, although this work can be captured on a simple digital camera as well. If needed, a flash can be used. The base for the artwork could be white.

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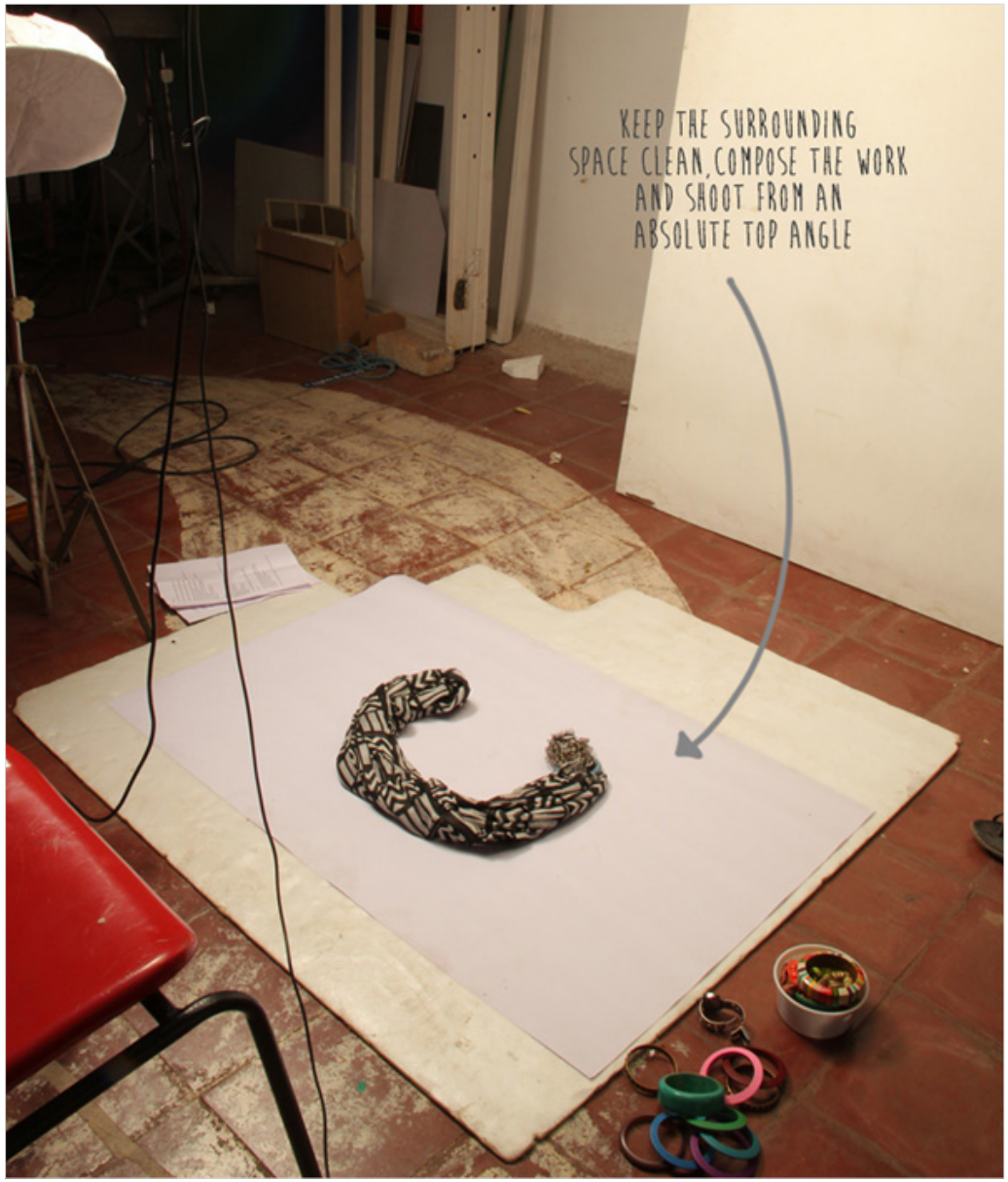

When the artwork is created on the base, it should be empty and clean with no objects and materials interfering. This helps in framing the image correctly, and reduces the effort of editing it on the computer.

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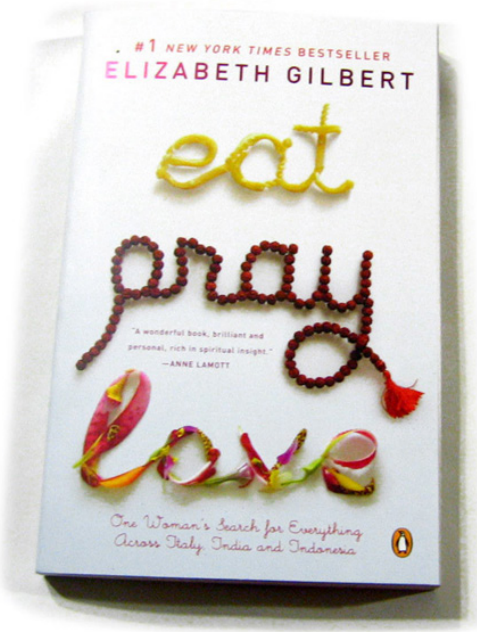
Possible Applications

Different visual communication solutions could be created. For instance, such a style of working could be employed for designing a book jacket cover, or an effective logo for a company or a limited edition poster about your favorite quote, it could be a cool rubber printed tee or tote bag. A popular example is the book cover of the bestseller 'Eat, Love and Pray', where each word has been created with a relevant object.



I have created 2 more examples to give an idea of how images created with everyday objects could be used. When used cleverly they can get across a message in a more memorable way.

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This visiting card for a textile designer has been aptly created using the type that I have created with fabric.

This DIY book cover gets across the message just right, with the entire word assembled using nuts bolts and scrap.

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https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-1/activity-sheets

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Activity Sheets

1. Can you create you very own font with everyday materials?

In this assignment, you will create a handmade font. In order to understand the nature of the medium that you select for creating this font explore it in every way possible.
'Is it possible to cut? Or bend? Does it stack, or can you simply arrange it?'

According to what you learn about the medium create a font; it could be thick or thin, long or short, small and cursive etc.

For Eg:
A rope could be used to create a cursive font as it is linear and connected in nature, but bricks on the other hand, would create a more heavy looking font, as they could be simply arranged or stacked. You could refer to books or existing examples on the web, but the idea is to have fun, and work playfully to create something unthought-of.

- **Medium:** Any material/object, or a combination of them.
- **Time:** 2 days.
- **Aim:** To create a completely handmade font from A-Z.
- **Process:** Using a huge white paper/sheet as a background, arrange the objects to create each letter individually. Capture this using a camera from the top angle. This shooting can be done in open spaces/daylight or even indoors in a photo studio.
- **Goal:** Have fun! And be crazy. Share your work. Discuss it as well.
- **Learning:** An understanding of the medium, composing and shooting a photograph of the artwork, and understand of proportions, negative/positive spaces while creating the form of a letter.

The goal of the assignment is to stimulate a different way of looking at things around us. Learning how to use their different qualities effectively in communication design. Some of the mediums might be tricky to work with and are purposefully challenging and some are easy to work with but all students should nonetheless attempt to use them effectively to create an interesting set of letters.

Downloads: Activity Sheet 1 - pdf

2. Try grouping mediums into different categories based on their qualities, and see what happens.

In this assignment, you have to group different mediums into categories.

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'For example, Rope, wire, string, fabric, branches, belts etc. are more linear and flowing in nature. Similarly Books, bricks, pouches, boxes are more blockish and stackable in nature.'

The assignment is to make a list of 20 materials/objects, (you can be as crazy as you want with what you list here) and against each of them you have to write 10 words - they can be physical qualities, adjectives or feelings that you associate with them.

- **Time:** 2 hours
- **Aim:** To create a list of materials and words associated with them.
- **Process:** Using a blank ruled page list 20 materials out. Exchange them with the person sitting next to you. Then take some time to connect things/words with those materials. How would you describe it? What sort of a feeling does it impart, what adjectives are suitable for it? Once done, compare your list with other students in the class, and see if there are any overlapping patterns and materials, which you have described.
- Goal: To understand the nature of the material, choose apt adjectives, get different ideas and articulate correctly.
- **Learning:** An understanding of the nature of different mediums in order to use them effectively.

The goal of the assignment is to understand the medium up to the point that we can use it differently. Not just use it for what it was created. Water was made for drinking, but I could create a font using water as well. Some of the mediums might be tricky to describe and write about, but all students should nonetheless attempt to make this list of words. Submit the list at the end of the day, so a comprehensive list could be made and copied out for all students.

Downloads: Activity Sheet 2 - pdf

3. 'Having fun with Words'.

The assignment is to choose one word, from a mixed bag of chits. Remember that word. Spend about half the day thinking, how you want to create it and what it should communicate.

- **Time:** 1 day.
- **Aim:** Creating a word with a handmade font.
- **Process:** Using a huge white paper/sheet as a background, arrange the objects to create the entire word. Capture this image using a camera from the top angle. This shooting can be done in open spaces/daylight or even indoors in a studio. Take care to edit and clean the image on Photoshop or any image editing software.
- **Goal:** Learning how to choose the medium effectively to communicate the given word, well.
- **Learning:** Selecting mediums and what the effect that different mediums could have on the same word.

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All students should attempt this assignment; it would be interesting to see what happens if 2 or more students select the same word, each student would express it differently. There should be a collective viewing of this assignment followed by a discussion.

Downloads: Activity Sheet 3 - pdf

4. Can you find a font in nature? And spot them in everyday objects?

For this assignment you need to go out in the open spaces, lawns, corridors, outside buildings etc. or you can choose to sift through all sorts of everyday objects and spot letter forms, and capture them as an image.

'For example, look at this interesting letter A, it has been spotted amongst the criss crossing branches of a tree by a student and captured as an image. On the other hand this clothes clip makes a perfect capital 'A'.

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• **Time:** 1 day.
• **Aim:** To spot letters in nature and everyday objects that surrounds us. Try spotting at least 3 different letters forms.
• **Process:** Go out, explore and try observing everything around you carefully, try noticing different forms, look at objects from different angles and perspectives, and you will be surprised with what you can find.
• **Goal:** Making your observations sharper, and a sense of understanding the form.
• **Learning:** How to spot interesting things in day to day life, which can add humor, interest, surprise to your work.

This blog link documents the works of students from IDC, IIT Bombay; it is a great reference for this assignment.
http://typostudents.blogspot.in/2010/11/finding-english-and-devnagri.html

Students should make an attempt to step out of the boundaries of a classroom, into the open, in order to understand and enjoy this assignment. More than learning it is about having fun with your work, and getting surprised by what each student can find, and where. It should end with a small exhibition with prints of all the images. It would be interesting to see what happens if 2 or more students spot the same letters, amongst different objects.

Downloads: Activity Sheet 4 - pdf

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Links

Links of images used from Creative Common:

- http://www.flickr.com/photos/laurenmanning/6609665197/
- http://stupendo-boutique.deviantart.com/art/whaam-panel-detail-351106229
- http://www.flickr.com/photos/sonofgroucho/4043238900/lightbox/
- http://www.flickr.com/search/?l=commderiv&q=google%20logo
- http://www.flickr.com/photos/cosmic_bandita/2135092162/
- https://www.google.com/search?as_q=stefan+sagmeister&tbs=sur:fmc&biw=1920&bih=955&sei=Msr-BUeXoF8yBkwWhtIFw&tbm=isch

Links that can be referred to while creating:

- http://www.voicesofeastanglia.com/2012/09/herb-lubalin-typographer-extraordinaire.html
- http://www.handmadefont.com/
- https://www.google.co.in/search?q=paper+fonts&client=firefox-a&hs=a6t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=V3zeUc6WHIOlrQfHvoDQDg&ved=0CCsQsAQ&biw=1312&bih=752
- http://www.designboom.com/interviews/designboom-interview-stefan-sagmeister-2/
- http://vimeo.com/6382511
- http://www.flickr.com/photos/rosebudmagazine/sets/72157608998517769/

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/handmade-type-part-1/video

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Video

Handmade Type - Part 1

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Contact Details

This documentation for the Course was done by Ruchi Shah, IDC, IIT Bombay.

You can get in touch with her at ruchishah1982[at]gmail.com

You can write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

Helpdesk Details:
Co-ordinator
Project e-kalpa
Industrial Design Centre
IIT Bombay
Powai
Mumbai 400076
India

Phone: 091-22-2159 6805/ 091-22-2576 7802
Email: dsource.in[at]gmail.com